

A New Race of the Little Owl from Transylvania

by DR. ANDREW KEVE AND STEPHEN KOHL

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The Little Owl of Transylvania has always been regarded as belonging to the nominate form *Athene noctua noctua* Scopoli. However Madarász (1900)¹ commented concerning this population as follows: "In Siebenburgen kommen etwas lichtere mit mehr rötlichem Anflug vor, welche indessen von der mediterraner Form *A. glaux* sehr entfernt stehen." Later Dombrowski (1912)² expressed his opinion in the following terms: "Die siebenbürgischen und west rumänischen Stücke sind von den Dobrogeavögeln etwas verschieden, indem selbe zwar auch teilweise etwas licht gefärbt sind, deren Färbung etwas ins Rötliche zieht."

Unaware of these opinions Keve reached the same conclusion as Madarász after investigating 10 examples from Transylvania with Hungarian specimens, and, quite independantly Kohl noted precisely the same differences, the freshly collected material consisted of 13 adult ♂♂, 12 adult ♀♀, 6 adult unsexed individuals, 5 juvenile ♂♂, 3 juvenile ♀♀ and 1 unsexed juvenile.

The above material substantially supports the earlier descriptions of Madarász and Dombrowski and the opinion that the Little Owl of Transylvania is new to science; for this population we propose the name:—

Athene noctua daciae subsp. nov.

Diagnosis: *A. n. daciae* resembles *A. n. noctua* except that it is somewhat lighter and has a rufous wash on the mantle, though this is not so marked as it is in *A. n. indigena* the rectrices are similar to those of the latter in that they are never barred but only spotted: sometimes even these are lacking. The underparts are slightly paler, in this respect different from *A. n. noctua*.

Type: ♀ Reghin, East Transylvania, 10th July 1957. Coll. St. Kohl, in the collections of the Hungarian Institute of Ornithology. Registered No. D 650.

Allotype: ♂ Dódorád, near Reghin, East-Transylvania, 19th November 1958, Coll. St. Kohl, in the collections of the Hungarian Institute of Ornithology. Registered No. D 651.

The Little Owl of Transylvania is intermediate between *A. n. noctua* and *A. n. indigena*. The upperparts are pale soil-brown lightly washed with rufous. The crown has long whitish striations, the rest of the back is spotted with white. The spotting of the primaries is less contrasting than in *A. n. noctua*. The rectrices are of the same colour as the upperparts or slightly paler. The transverse bars are yellowish and never complete being often reduced to roundish spots or even lacking. A terminal bar is seldom noted. The only difference between the sexes is one of size, the females being the larger. The birds are darkest when in freshly moulted autumn plumage, October to December, and then show a slight violet reflection; this latter character is lost by January. The white underparts also have a slight yellowish wash, but this too disappears by January. The birds are palest in July when also the striations of head become accentuated. The spotting of the underparts is darkest in fresh plumage and fades in July. The greatest variability is found in the rectrices.

Wing Measurements :

♂♂ 153, 157, 157, 158, 160, 160, 160, 160, 161, 162, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166 mm. Average=160.37 mm.

♀♀ 160, 160, 160, 160, 160, 160, 162, 162, 162, 164, 164, 165, 166, 168 mm. Average=162.78 mm.

Distribution: Transylvania as far as the inner slopes of the Carpathians, both in the lowlands and in the hills. In the west as far as the western Transylvanian Alps: in the north as far as the Alps of Radna. The valley of the river Strigy (Streiu) would appear to be the zone between *A. n. daciae* and *A. n. indigena*.

Our thanks are due to Dr. James M. Harrison for reading our paper before publication.

References:—

¹. Madarász, J., 1900. *Die Vögel Ungarns*. p. 546.

². Dombrowski, R., 1912. *Ornis Romaniae*. p. 406.

African Serpent Eagle in Sierra Leone

by J. H. HARROP

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Mattru, the headquarters both of the Jong Chiefdom and of the Bonthe District, is situated in the South Western Province of Sierra Leone, rather more than thirty miles up the Jong river from Bonthe. Most of the surrounding countryside is "farm bush", though there are some big trees left along the riverside.

On 31st March 1960, while I was stationed at Mattru, Ronald Albrecht and Ronald Baker, both sons of local missionaries, brought me a bird which they had shot three or four miles north of there, not far from the rapids at Willai. I examined the bird and found it to be a Gold Coast Serpent Eagle, *Dryotriorchis spectabilis spectabilis* (Schlegel). When I saw that this bird was not listed from Sierra Leone in the first volume of Bannerman's *Birds of Tropical West Africa*, I decided to measure and photograph it. Inside the bird's bill I found the end of the tail of what proved to be a Night Adder (*Causus rhombeatus*—Lichtenstein). I was therefore able to take a colour photograph of the Serpent Eagle, with the snake which had been its last prey protruding from its bill.

During the summer, this transparency was sent to Dr. D. A. Bannerman, who fully confirms my identification of the bird as belonging to the Upper Guinea race.

**Geographical variation in the
South African populations of the Magpie-Shrike
Lanius melanoleucus Jardine**

by P. A. CLANCEY

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The Magpie-Shrike *Lanius melanoleucus* is a large-sized, pied, gregarious laniid of southern and eastern Africa, of which two geographical races are currently admitted by workers, these being nominate *L. melanoleucus* Jardine, 1831: Orange River, and *L. m. aequatorialis* (Reichenow), 1887: Gasa Mts., 12–14 miles south-west of Kondoa, Kondoa-Irangi district,